

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

This memorandum points up certain dangers in the Arab-Israeli situation which loom larger than before. An NIE on the fedayeen as a factor in the situation is scheduled for completion in the next two weeks, but the recent pace of events gives rise to some immediate concerns, which call for earlier warning.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Attachment:

Memo for Director, dtd 30 Apr 69,
"Heightened Dangers in the Middle East"

30 April 69
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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*Formerly a
Memorandum
dated 30 Apr*

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

30 April 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Heightened Dangers in the Middle East

1. Despite the explosive potential in the situation, our net judgment has been against the likelihood of an Arab-Israeli war or the overthrow of an Arab government. This was based on the following calculations:

a. The Arab armed forces were clearly not ready for another round with the Israeli Defense Forces.

b. Nasser appeared to believe that the best interim solution for his problems was the mobilization, under Four Power aegis, of diplomatic pressure on Israel for withdrawal from the occupied territories, and the Soviets encouraged him in this line. Hussein agreed with Nasser on this and their alliance strengthened the position of both.

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c. It seemed likely that Nasser and Hussein feared the potential of the fedayeen movement and felt that an accommodation would put them in a better position to deal with it. They appeared to have enough support in their countries to win in a showdown with the more hard-line fedayeen, if it came.

d. The radical governments of Syria and Iraq were being comparatively quiet and the fedayeen generally were staying out of Arab politics.

e. Israel took the position that there were no dangers in the situation that it could not handle. The evidence was that the fedayeen were not really hurting them very much.*

3. None of the judgments above has necessarily been invalidated by events, but several new and important developments are heating up the situation in ways not entirely foreseen:

a. Frustrated by lack of progress, Nasser has tried to move the Great Powers to bring greater pressure on Israel for withdrawal by firing at Israeli troops and installations and, recently, by sending raiding parties across the Canal.

* These views underlay the judgments in NIE 30-2-68, "The Eastern Arab World in the Aftermath of Defeat," 19 December 1968, and SNIE 30-69, "Some Implications of a Search for an Arab-Israeli Accommodation," 27 February 1969.

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b. Fedayeen raids into Israeli territory and rocket attacks across the border have been relatively ineffective in a military sense, but they are political dynamite in Israel. In response, the Israelis have entered upon a policy of "Active Defense" which involves attacks on fedayeen camps in Arab countries at times of their own choosing, and some attacks on Arab government installations as well. Such raids, of course, bring the UAR, Jordanian, and Iraqi regular forces into more direct confrontation with the Israeli Defense Force.

c. Probably more important than all these other factors is the emerging conflict between the fedayeen and those Arab Governments which appear to be or can be represented as being less than completely sympathetic with their aims and methods; this means, of course, Nasser and Hussein who cannot avoid the appearance of involvement in efforts to bring about an Arab-Israeli settlement, and who are also most vulnerable to charges of responsibility for failure against Israel in 1967 and since.

d. An associated development is the apparent willingness of Syria and Iraq to take advantage of opportunities to hurt their old opponent and rival, Nasser, and King Hussein whom

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they regard as the conservative friend of the U.S. For Syria there is the added opportunity to do something about Lebanon, whose Western orientation under a government strongly influenced by Christians, it has long resented.

5. King Hussein has long been living on a volcano and has learned to do it with aplomb. But events have brought him closer to a situation in which further concessions to the fedayeen bring the double risk of loss of control in his own country and provocation of a major Israeli intervention. He has consistently argued that he cannot afford to risk a confrontation with the fedayeen until after he has won concessions from Israel. Now the question seems to be whether the fedayeen will allow him to try for an accommodation. He must be seriously concerned that for all the protestations of political neutrality by the fedayeen leader, Arafat, a Palestinian-dominated Jordan is regarded by many fedayeen as a step along the road to their ultimate goals.

6. President Helou is well aware of the dangers implicit in his giving way to fedayeen demands for more and more freedom of action in Lebanon. It appears that for a time, thinking the Army would back him, he was ready to bring a showdown. He seems now to fear that he could not win such a confrontation. His problem

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is that if he makes concessions to the fedayeen he invites Israeli reprisals, and if he attempts a confrontation with them he endangers the stability of the country. In any event, he knows that some Lebanese leftists and the Syrians, utilizing their fedayeen puppet group Al Saiqa would be quite content to see either one come about.

7. Nasser is probably less vulnerable to fedayeen attacks or to hostile Syrian or Iraqi action, than is Hussein or the Lebanese Government. But if either Jordan or Lebanon become the scene of turmoil between the proponents of the government and the radical and pro-fedayeen elements, or of a governmental change favorable to them, he is unlikely to resist fedayeen demands for long. He would probably soon abandon attempts to obtain a settlement with the Israelis. Nasser, Hussein, or Helon could fall victim to a fedayeen assassination attack. If any was to be assassinated, trouble would be likely in his country, with a good chance of its spilling over into other Arab countries.

8. The next few weeks are likely to be critical ones. Inherent in the Lebanese situation is the possibility of civil war leading to a takeover by radical elements who would accede to fedayeen demands. Inherent in the Jordanian situation is the possibility of a Palestinian-dominated government largely made up

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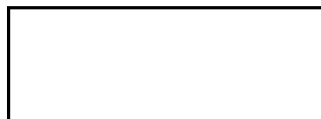
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of fedayeen. In either case, Israel would be sorely tempted to take military action before things had gone too far.

9. We do not believe the evidence now warrants an estimate that any of these developments is likely, but we believe the chances of their coming about have increased.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



ABBOT SMITH
Chairman

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